

4658  
3  
K. Gibson (Mr.) Bishop of  
Comana

PASTORAL LETTER

O F

MATTHEW,

BISHOP of COMANA, and V. A.

ADDRESSED

To all the Clergy, Secular and Regular;

A N D

To all the Faithful of the Northern District.

---

---

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE:

Printed and Sold by HALL and ELLIOT;  
And Sold by J. P. COGLAN, No. 37, Duke-  
street, Grosvenor Square, London.

---

MDCCXC.



M A T T H E W,  
By the GRACE of GOD and of the  
APOSTOLIC SEE,

BISHOP of COMANA, and V. A.

To all the Clergy, Secular and Regular;

A N D

To all the Faithful of the Northern District.

Health and Benediction.

---

*Dearly beloved brethren and children in Christ,*

**O**UR blessed Redeemer told his disciples that they should be reviled and persecuted by men, speaking all evil against them, untruly, for his sake. In the earlier ages of christianity, the brightest models of virtue and learning were calumniated as enemies to the state, fomenters of rebellion, avowed adversaries to every principle of honesty, honour, and

A

con-

conscience. These, with many other charges of the blackest die, stand recorded in the writings of St. Justin, Origen, and other incontestible monuments.

For these two centuries past, have not the same arms of defamation, with uncommon asperity and violence, been levelled against the small remnant of catholicity in this nation? The dark pencil of misrepresentation, painting them in the hideous colours of disaffection, disloyalty, and revolt—invectives, virulent and envenomed—bloody scenes, the sport of malevolent fancy, exaggerated with every circumstance of horror, and displayed in the most terrifying language, have been all successively employed to exhibit a distressed people, writhed under calamities, as an object of distrust, danger, and popular detestation. That they have not been utterly exterminated and rooted up; that they live to lament  
their

their miseries, is a kind of miracle, for which, under the protection of a partial Heaven; they are indebted to the enlightened humanity of their supreme governors; to the mild and gracious reign of a sovereign, in whom benevolence and lenity shine, with peculiar lustre, amidst the brightest of his virtues.

Despairing to gain credit with their enemies, the most humiliating and wounding circumstance in distress! by appeals and protestations of their suffering innocence, they seldom attempted to clear their characters from the slanderous charges. "The papists (said a writer, with some humour) "are so eternally dunned *with deposing* " *powers, papal dispensations, pardons,* " *perjuries, breach of faith to heretics,* "and the like, that I should not much "wonder, if they, at length, acquiesced in the odious imputations, and "cried out, wearied with importunity, *Even as you please gentlemen!*"

Never-

Nevertheless, surrounded by storms of persecuting rage, they never ceased to give proofs of their integrity, more lasting and striking, in the eye of God and man, than the most durable ever consigned to fugitive and perishable memorials.

The whole nation hath long been witness, our inveterate enemies have long been unwilling witnesses to our uniform and exemplary discharge of every civil and social duty—peaceable comportment towards our fellow subjects of all denominations—prompt obedience to the civil laws of our country—submission to temporal government, unabated by the unrelenting rigour of cruel and oppressive statutes. Every species of temptation hath been held out to shake our principles, and seduce us from the sacred paths of duty. A papal dispensation, a single act of mental reservation, or *meritorious kind* of perjury, would have  
put

put a final period to our miseries; opened the avenues to places of public trust and authority; unfolded the gates to honours, emoluments, and preferments. The enlightened and well principled catholic remains unshaken and unseduced; choosing rather to sit quietly under his own vine or his own fig-tree, than, by offering violence to his conscience, wield *the sword of magistracy*, rise to the highest rank or most elevated station. This conscientious and inflexible adherence to duty, in spite of every terror and allurements, is the most undeniable evidence of unshaken innocence and integrity. “ Away “ (says my Lord Clarendon) with the “ antichristian spirit of discrediting “ the *catholic* religion, as if it would “ not suffer its children to be dutiful “ and loyal subjects to *Protestant* Kings “ and Princes.”

The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, the divine source of all power  
im-

imparted to men, is a God of union, peace and harmony, not a firebrand of strife and contention. But, on supposing he had established two powers, *spiritual* and *temporal*, impressed with a native bias to interfere and mutually destroy one another; a scene of confusion and dreadful anarchy must often arise chargeable on the author; a consequence horrible to thought! Discriminating the limits of these two powers we render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and to God the things that are God's: the tribute is Cæsar's, the church is God's. Upon this principle, the glorious legion, on the verge of eternity, replied, with a modest, yet invincible firmness, " We  
 " are your soldiers, O Emperor! but  
 " servants of the true God; we owe  
 " you military service and obedience;  
 " but we cannot renounce him, who  
 " is our creator and master, and also  
 " your's. In all things which are  
 " not against his law we most wil-  
 " lingly

“lingly obey you; we have taken  
 “an oath to God before we took one  
 “to you: you can place no confi-  
 “dence in our second oath, should  
 “we violate the first.”—This, from  
 the earliest ages, hath been the unvari-  
 ed spirit and language of our religion:  
 at this day, is the fixed and immoveable  
 standard of our lives and conduct.

To prevent any encroachment of  
 the *political* upon the *religious* creed;  
 to preserve sacred and inviolate the  
 deposit of faith, the basis of our eter-  
 nal welfare; is a duty of the episcopal  
 character, with peculiar energy, en-  
 forced in the inspired writings. *A time*  
*will come, says the Apostle to St. Tim,*  
*when they shall not bear sound doctrine,*  
*but according to their own desires, having*  
*itching ears, shall heap up to themselves*  
*teachers—But for thy part watch, hold*  
*the form of sound words,—I charge thee*  
*before God and Jesus Christ.*—Hence, at  
 different periods, Prelates of unrivalled  
 virtue

virtue and abilities, armed with the buckler of unshaken faith, rose superior to every trial rather than make a voluntary surrender of the least tittle of the invaluable inheritance; *Heaven and earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass.*

In obedience to these sacred precepts, illustrated by severe, yet animating, examples; we, with our Venerable Brethren, thought it a matter of deep importance, loudly calling for the exertions of our pastoral zeal, to declare our impartial and unprejudiced sentiments, whether the oath, (conveyed to us *through the channel of a Newspaper*) lately framed for ourselves and the faithful committed to our charge, could be taken with a safe conscience. Whether the catholics of this kingdom, were to be branded with an indelible stigma, and involved in the guilt and every baneful consequence of a criminal test. The pilot  
who

who sees the vessel in danger of splitting against a rock, concealed under the waves, and neglects to give warning, betrays his trust. The subject being of such essential magnitude, to prevent a deviation from the strict line of duty in the delivery of our decision, with indefatigable zeal and industry we employed every measure conducive to the purpose. With attention, abundantly persevering and minute, we perused a body of voluminous information, replete with a profusion of elaborate remarks, sent to each of the Vicars Ap. in order to elucidate the matter previous to their meeting. We consulted great abilities; discussed, placed the object in every point of view. Yet it hath been feelingly “ regretted that none of those  
 “ persons, who have been concerned  
 “ in promoting and conducting this  
 “ business, were called in to explain  
 “ their sentiments.” This, surely, is paying a miserable compliment to a

respectable character, who was present at the discussion of the subject, long distinguished by his unremitting assiduity and attendance on the rise and progress of the business, through its different stages. To him we looked up, with ardour, for every species of information necessary to dispel and disperse the mist from our eyes; not a syllable fell from his lips, but was received with avidity, listened to with a patient and most attentive ear. Yet no ray of light escaped; no beam of illustration enabling us to pervade a dense cloud of obscurity, or to see the path in colours undeserving of our marked reprehension. In justice, however, to his character be it said, that though his endeavours were not crowned with success adequate to his wishes, he in a very solemn and edifying manner, in presence of the assembly, declared that he would submit, and raise no opposition to our unanimous resolve.

The

The unanimous condemnation of the new oath, by the four Vicars Ap. in England, perfectly according with the declared sentiments of his Eminence Cardinal B—n C—gni, much attached to this nation, and completely conversant in the English language; hath likewise in a most deliberate and solemn manner been approved by persons, placed in the most conspicuous station, heightening the glory of the mitre, by their virtue, abilities, literary productions and pregnant testimonies of their steady allegiance to our Gracious Sovereign, viz. By four Archbishops assembled by appointment; by ten Bishops, seven of whom, in a provincial synod, with their Archbishop at their head, distinguished by the lustre of his talents, and apostolic zeal; without a dissenting voice, after mature deliberation and discussion, pronounced the oath to be unlawful. More of the *episcopal order* we have not consulted. We can produce, if ne-

necessary, a numerous and most respectable list of characters, well known to the world for their theological abilities, concurring, with unanimity, in the same opinion. Shall it be said, as usual, that these exalted characters are strangers to the true sense and genuine import of the oath? We blush to dwell upon the idea!!! An oath impenetrably obscure to these eminent lights, impervious to the piercing eyes of the keenest theology; to an unlettered and illiterate multitude must be wrapt up in tenfold darkness, enigmatical and mysterious as the oath, ridiculed in the annals of this country, which contained an *etcætera* in the midst of it.

An oath, its obligation being most awful, ought to be, in the first place, *Clear*; perfectly intelligible to him who takes it, that he may know and discharge, in its fullest extent, the religious tie. 2dly, *True*. *Thou shalt swear,*

*swear, as the Lord liveth, in truth.*

Who will dare to call the avenger of perjury, whose eternal eye sees the abstrusest thought, to corroborate a positive or probable falsehood? 3dly, *Necessary. The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

These are some of the essential requisites of a lawful oath; of which the oath, lately intended for the Catholics of this kingdom, is destitute. It is, 1st, in some parts, *Ambiguous, obscure, captious, ensnaring, liable to misconstruction.* 2dly, In others, *problematical, controverted, in the ordinary acceptation of the words founded on, or blended with falsehood.* 3dly, It *unnecessarily* disclaims some points which constitute no article of a *political creed*. On these grounds, and for these reasons, it appeared deserving of our censure. Our dignity, honour, character, the interests of religion are deeply concerned in preserving our tribunal pure, untainted, and unsuspected of unworthy motives.

motives. We are amenable for our conduct to higher powers, which will hear impartially, investigate patiently, decide wisely and justly. Not wishing for particular tenderness or compassion, we are willing to meet those, who controvert the rectitude of our sentence, before *that* tribunal, and to abide by its final decision.

This method of terminating controversies, warranted by the uniform discipline of the church through every age and country, breathes a spirit of union, harmony, and due subordination to divine appointments. An appeal to the *Catholics of England at large* is a measure pregnant with the seeds of fatal animosities and endless discord; a measure bringing not peace but a sword cutting asunder the sacred bonds of charity, flying over the kingdom, killing not the body by corporal death, but souls by the guilt of sin. By raising the *laity* above their  
*prelates,*

*prelates, the sheep above their pastors, it invades the rights of the sanctuary, subverts the FORM established by Jesus Christ, and sacrilegiously infringes the system of infinite wisdom investing Bishops with a commission to govern the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Every Bishop, though not a supreme, is an authentic judge of controversies to his flock. Hence, until his sentence be reversed by higher ecclesiastical authority, or proved to be clearly wrong, it is the duty of the faithful, trusted to his care, to obey his decrees. Obey your prelates, and be subject to them; for they watch as being to render an account of your souls, that they may do this with joy, and not with grief; for this is not expedient for you. Obedience and authority are reciprocal. In doubtful cases, presumption is in favour of the superior.*

But

But is not the new oath *merely* a pledge of our social and civil principles?

Ans. 1st. We are willing to take the firmest oath of true faith and allegiance to the gracious person and government of his Majesty George the Third, that is required of the Catholics of any other nation to any other government throughout the earth.

2dly. We are already bound down with the most solemn oath, tendered by the legislature in 1778, to bear true allegiance to this government; to abjure all sort of temporal power in any other within this realm; and to renounce, under the same solemn obligations, the doctrines of systematic perfidy, with which we stood (very unjustly) charged.

3dly. That the *new* oath, is not *merely* a civil test, is so evident from  
its

its contents, that any attempt to prove it would be an insult to common sense.

4thly. An oath, being an act of religion, is a spiritual matter cognizable by the Prelates of the Church, particularly, if to *be imposed* upon themselves. When found destitute of its necessary conditions, they are bound to consult not only their own, but the eternal welfare of their flocks ; by pointing out the danger. A parent who sees a beloved child fondling a *scorpion*, ready to shoot a baneful sting, or putting to his lips a *poisonous draught*, rendered fair to the eye, and inviting to the taste, cries out in the language of the apostle, *neither touch, nor taste, nor handle.*

The *new* oath, it is said, only *expresses* what the oath of 1778 *implies.*

2dly, Nothing more is *meant* than a *political* test.

C

Ans.

Ans. The first is *clearly* false.—  
 The second is a delusive, but no new  
 artifice, suggested, particularly, (as we  
 read in the *Memoirs of Missionary  
 Priests*) to Roger Cadwallador. “Some  
 “gentlemen laboured, by many words  
 “to persuade him, at the place of ex-  
 “ecution, that, in the contents of the  
 “oath, there was no denial *meant* of  
 “the Pope’s spiritual authority; but  
 “only a *mere acknowledgment of allegiance*  
 “to the sovereign prince.” The holy  
 champion, by way of confutation,  
 with undaunted courage, meets death  
 in his most frightful forms, and from  
 the mansions of bliss is now looking  
 down, with pity mixed with holy  
 indignation against those, who, de-  
 luded themselves, are deluding simple  
 minds with the infernal stratagem.

We, therefore, trust that the ad-  
 vocates for an oath, reprobated by  
 the unanimous concurrence of such  
 weighty authorities, will no longer  
 con-

continue victims to their own prejudices, and that these *ideal numbers* of Catholics, (*mere non entities, we hope*) will pause on the brink of the precipice! But they plume themselves chiefly upon the prominent feature of the bill, the appellation of *the Protestant Catholic Dissenters*. "On the propriety of this description and its probable efficacy, (they say) the merit of the plan adopted by us chiefly rests." We wish not to rob them of the *glory* of the invention. If they compass their object, they will effect more than the accumulated efforts of the most determined enemies of the Catholic Church ever could achieve. Let us minutely inspect the component parts of this *hitherto wholly unknown, but most accurate and pointed description*, as they term it. We are to be called *Protesting*, because, by the oath, we *protest* against certain *pernicious* doctrines falsely imputed to us. But they very justly add, (an observation  
to

to be deeply rooted in our minds)  
 “ It certainly must be admitted that  
 “ the preamble is to be considered as  
 “ referring to the protestation con-  
 “ tained in the oath, and that if by  
 “ the oath any doctrine be protested  
 “ against, which is not *pernicious*, or a  
 “ fortiori, if any doctrine be protested  
 “ against, which is an article of faith,  
 “ the preamble cannot be acquiesced  
 “ in by any Catholic, *with a safe con-*  
 “ *science*, whether the doctrines pro-  
 “ tested against by the oath be or  
 “ be *not pernicious*, and whether any  
 “ of them be matters of faith, will  
 “ be afterwards examined.” Until  
 that point be not only *examined*,  
 but *clearly* established, no Catholic  
 can, with a *safe conscience*, acquiesce  
 in the appellation of *protesting*. The  
 period is probably at *some* distance.

But *Catholic Dissenters!* when the  
 Catholic Church alters the language  
 of her creeds, councils, synods, books  
 of

of devotion, &c. &c. *when she assumes the name of a Catholic dissenting Church, then her members may glory in the appellation of catholic dissenters.* In the interim let her children retain the name given them by that mother, who hath brought them forth in Jesus Christ. “It is no blemish to a church, (says a Venerable Prelate, whose memory is recent and dear to us all) to have a new name given her, by her revolted children; because this has always been the case of the true Church of Christ in every age: but ’tis a great blemish to a Church to adopt, of her own accord, any such name; (as all modern sectaries have, of their own accord, adopted the name of *Protestants*, from their *protesting* against that which they found the current doctrine of the Church) because this has never been the property of any but heretics and schismatics.” *Grounds of the old Religion*, C. iv. Sect. vi.

But

But, it is asked, are we not *Dissenters* from the Church of England in certain points of faith?

Ans. Most certainly not, in the *ecclesiastical* force of the word, which here ought to be our rule. As the title of the *Holy Church* distinguished true believers from *Infidels* and *Jews*; that of *Catholics* distinguished them from all Christian *Dissenters*, whether Heretics or Schismatics. Every page of ecclesiastical memoirs bears testimony to this assertion.

Nor in the *grammatical* acceptation are we *Dissenters*. Error is defined a deviation, or dissent, from the standard of truth; hence it essentially pre-supposes the existence of truth; of course a church founded, as we believe, on the sandy basis of error, is to be stiled the church *dissenting*, or deviating from the church erected on the pillar of eternal and unerring truth.

truth. Not vice versa, unless you admit that *truth* can be at the same time prior and posterior to itself, which revolts common sense. Hence our renowned champion, in the field of controversy, confidently avers, " that  
 " *Catholic Dissenters* are in the univer-  
 " sal language and judgment of the  
 " Catholic Church in all past ages, as  
 " great a solecism, as complete non-  
 " sense, as *Christian Turks*, or Catho-  
 " lic Infidels." Dr Hawarden, *Charity*  
*and Truth*. Chap. iii. N. 4.

More might be said on the subject, but it neither suits the present occasion, nor seems necessary: we shall, therefore, conclude, with earnestly intreating and recommending to you, for the most pressing motives, to maintain, with unshaken constancy, inviolably sacred and incorrupt, the noble inheritance of *doctrine*, bequeathed to you by our Blessed Redeemer. This is the *tower of David*,  
*built*

*built with bulwarks, a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men.* The impregnable fortress against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. Transmit to posterity, unfulfilled and untarnished, the splendor of a *Name*, embellished and adorned by the lustre, vigour, firmness of your ancestors.

This you will effectually perform, by zealously discharging the duties you owe to God, to the church, to your country, to your fellow-citizens, and to the rest of mankind. The laws of true religion are the most solid and firm support of our civil and social rights. “ There is, (says  
 “ Clement XIV.) so close a connection  
 “ between the rights of divine and  
 “ human power, that all, who are  
 “ conscious of the power and autho-  
 “ rity of Kings, being confirmed by  
 “ a sanction of the christian law, with  
 “ cheerful minds pay obedience to  
 “ their

“ their Sovereigns, revere their power,  
“ reverence and respect their dignity.

“ And really considering the divine  
“ institutions in this point, to be  
“ equally interesting to the preserva-  
“ tion of the public tranquillity,  
“ and to the salvation of souls, we  
“ are thereby induced earnestly to  
“ exhort you, that next after God,  
“ and the sacred rites of the divine  
“ worship established in the Church,  
“ you will turn all your thought  
“ and care to inspire the minds of  
“ the people with a spirit of sub-  
“ mission and obedience to their  
“ sovereign princes.—Be careful that  
“ those, whose instruction in the  
“ law of the gospel is committed  
“ to your charge, be made sensible,  
“ from their very infancy, of their  
“ sacred obligation, *of loyalty to their*  
“ *Kings, of respect to their authority,*  
“ *and of submission to their laws, not*  
“ *only for wrath, but for conscience*  
“ *sake.* This point of your duty

D

“ you

“ you will, most completely, dif-  
 “ charge, by joining to your daily  
 “ prayers for the people, particular  
 “ ones for the preservation of their  
 “ Sovereigns, that they may rule  
 “ their subjects with justice, peace,  
 “ and equity, that possessed with a  
 “ knowledge and fear of their Crea-  
 “ tor, who exercises a superior do-  
 “ minion in the kingdoms of this  
 “ world, they may espouse and ad-  
 “ vance the rights of the same Su-  
 “ preme Being, with a spirit of piety  
 “ and sanctity. What is more just  
 “ and reasonable, than that these  
 “ guardians of the state, and prefer-  
 “ vers of the public tranquillity,  
 “ should have constant prayers offered  
 “ up to the Lord for them, by  
 “ those whose function, according to  
 “ divine appointment, is, to treat of  
 “ the affairs between God and man,  
 “ and in quality of mediators and  
 “ interpreters, to present the suppli-  
 “ cations of the people to the Lord,  
 “ in

“ in conjunction with their own ? ” —  
Circular letter of Clement XIV. to  
the Patriarchs, Primates, Arch-Bishops  
and Bishops. *Rome at St. Mary-Major's,*  
*the 12th of Dec. 1769.*

The voice of calumny affirming that  
our obedience, in *spirituals*, to the su-  
preme head of our Church, is incom-  
patible with the temporal rights of  
Sovereigns, must be for ever silenced.  
The successor of S. Peter, the Prince  
of the Apostles, in virtue of that *full*  
*power of feeding, ruling, and governing*  
*the universal Church, given to him in*  
*the person of St. Peter, by our Lord*  
*Jesus Christ*, with particular force and  
energy, traces out and inculcates the  
indispensable duties of the subject to  
his temporal Prince. Such is the use  
he makes of the power with which  
he was invested, by Jesus Christ say-  
ing to S. Peter, *Feed my Lambs: feed*  
*my Sheep!* Conformably to these sa-  
cred lessons, we exhort you ever to re-

remember that our religion is that of love, peace, and forbearance, strictly requiring an exercise of the obedience enjoined by *Christ* to the *Civil Magistrate*. Besides fulfilling every other duty of faithful subjects and peaceable citizens, cease not to offer up your ardent prayers for the prosperity of our most gracious Sovereign King George III. and the Royal Family, the welfare of this kingdom; and, agreeably to the precept of our Lord Jesus Christ, for those too, who, from mistaken or malicious motives, shall hate and persecute us, unjustly painting us as unworthy of more enlarged privileges.

As a pledge of our unceasing prayers and vows to Heaven in your favour, wishing you all happiness in Jesus Christ, we impart to you our Pastoral Benediction. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

31 DE 63

✠ Matthew Comanen, V. A.

January 15, 1790.